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Obama immigration chief says amnesty designed to cement illegals place in society

By [Stephen Dinan](#) - *The Washington Times* - Tuesday, December 9, 2014

The man who will oversee President Obama's new temporary amnesty said Tuesday that part of the reason for the program was to get the illegal immigrants working on the books, making it economically impossible for them ever to be deported by a future president.

Leon Rodriguez, speaking during a town hall meeting with his employees at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, said illegal immigrants shouldn't fear coming forward to report for the program because the order Mr. Obama issued last month will cement their place in society.

"If this program does what we want it to do, you will now have literally millions of people who will be working on the books, paying taxes, being productive. You cannot so easily by fiat now remove those people from the economy," said Mr. Rodriguez, who took over as agency director earlier this year.

His comments came the same day that Mr. Obama, speaking in Tennessee, also said he doubted any future administration would want to repeal his policy for fear of running afoul of voters.

So far, polls show voters aren't too keen on Mr. Obama's actions.

But Mr. Rodriguez said that as illegal immigrants are granted work permits and take jobs legally, they will become integral parts of the economy. He said that's why the government hasn't done more to deport most illegal immigrants.

"That's one of the major reasons, by the way, why they haven't been removed," he said. "Because whether we acknowledge it or not, a lot of those individuals have actually

been working, contributing in the economy, and if they were to be removed in fact that would have pretty dire economic consequences on the regions in which those individuals live. Now that's all going to be above board, and the potential consequences to our economy could potentially be quite severe."

Mr. Rodriguez said he is worried about fraud in the program, just as he is in other aspects of what his agency does. He said the agency still has yet to finalize plans for how to fight fraud, but said it will likely involve better training for the officers who will approve applications.

And he said there will be "balancing" between fighting fraud and trying to process the applications and making it as easy as possible to get approved.

"That's going to continue to be an ongoing area of concern," he said.

Mr. Obama's new program could offer temporary amnesty from deportation and grant work permits to more than 4 million illegal immigrants, in addition to the more than 600,000 who were granted similar benefits under his 2012 policy for so-called Dreamers.

That Dreamer policy has a 95 percent approval rate, which critics say is shockingly high. Supporters say that those who applied, however, were likely to self-select as the most qualified applicants — both because of the cost of applying and because of the danger of becoming known to immigration authorities.

But the man who helped form USCIS's fraud unit, who retired in 2011, said the agency never set up a risk-based system to try to weed out fraud from the Dreamer program. He said that's a must if the agency is going to try to process 4 million applications without doing in-person interviews of each applicant.

Mr. Rodriguez told employees the fees from the applications will cover the costs, and he said USCIS won't have to cut elsewhere to handle the new workload.

The Dreamer program, which was less than one-fifth the size of the new amnesty, put such a strain on the agency that it delayed processing of other applications from legal immigrants.

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